



## Challenge and Strategies: Sustaining and Enhancing CFL Learners' Interest, Motivation and Confidence

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# Challenge and Strategies: Sustaining and Enhancing CFL Learners' Interest, Motivation and Confidence

## 挑战与对策：保持及促进汉语学习者的兴趣、动机及信心

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### Abstract

This paper reports how the CFL learners at Ulster University (UU), in Northern Ireland, who at the end of Year One before moving on to Year 2, had experienced demotivation and a sense that their CFL was becoming ever more challenging and 'more and more complicated and difficult' to deal with, have been encouraged to sustain or regain or enhance confidence. It was due to the unique situation that the students in the BA honours in Applied Languages and Translation at the beginning of Year 2, are normally allowed to drop one of the three modern languages which they are required to take in their first year, and choose any two languages. It was fear that failure at Chinese would affect the overall result of their degree, some CFL learners choose to give up and take other language, which means their CFL learning stops at only one year beginner level. Therefore, how to sustain and enhance the CFL learners' interest, motivation and confidence became a big challenge. To that end, a series of learning strategies have been developed, which are all put under the category of 'Holistic Learning strategies' in this paper, to promote learners' understanding that learning a language which is very different from their mother tongue can add further dimensions to their thought patterns, and give herself or himself an edge in employment. Of all the strategies applied, benefitting from the unique nature of rich Chinese language, linguistically and philosophically, a two-pronged holistic teaching strategy (using Chinese sayings) of 以不变应万变 (yǐ bú biàn yìng wàn biàn) coping with shifting events by sticking to a fundamental principle and also 以万变应不变 (yǐ wàn biàn yìng bú biàn) applying changing methods to deal in the unchanged fundamental principles, because as another goes, 万变不离其宗 (wàn biàn bù lí qí zōng), indicating that things remain essentially the same despite all apparent changes, leading to 大道至简 (dà dào zhì jiǎn), indicating that the nature of the universe can be

the simplest, or the most profound takes the simplest form, was applied with CFL learners from diverse cultural backgrounds in Northern Ireland and appeared to be most effective and desirable to learners. Overall, the practical strategies applied in this study have proved a positive encouragement to the CFL learners, resulting in sustaining their interest, motivation, confidence; enhancing their knowledge practice and enriching their learning experience.

**Keywords:** Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), motivation, demotivation, holistic learning strategies

## 1. Introduction

This section will present the background to this study and the aim of this study including the research question and its hypothesis.

### *1.1 Background to the study: the unique situation*

CFL as credited courses at Ulster University (UU), in Northern Ireland is getting more and more popular with each passing year since it was established. Students enrolled on the Applied Languages and Translation (ALT) degree have had the option to take Chinese courses and are encouraged to take an appropriate level of HSK. This option on the specialist ALT degree, that also combines the study of two European languages, represents an excellent enhancement for students looking to gain the edge in the world of employment. At UU, Chinese has been taken as a minor component of the degrees: BA Honours English with Chinese; BA Honours French with Chinese; BA Honours German with Chinese; BA Honours Spanish with Chinese. In addition, Chinese can be combined as minor with BSc Business and Computing, as optional modules for BSc Honours Food and Nutrition. The unique situation at UU is that for a first year language student, s/he should also take additional modules and one of them is a modern foreign language, and at the beginning of the second year, the student can drop one. During the first semester of the first year beginner level, the learners feel ‘very interesting and really accessible’. However, from second semester, some learners started feeling ‘hard’ due to many reasons, and at the end of first year, there appeared ‘worries’ about ‘CFL gets more complex and more difficult with the progress of learning’. It was the fear that failure would affect the overall result of their degree, some would give up CFL to choose other courses, which forms a situation 望而生畏 or 望而却步 (wàng ér shēng wèi, wàng ér què bù), meaning forbidding, or step back. Therefore, to avoid potential risks of giving up, it is a critical point and a big challenge to build and sustain their interest, confidence

throughout the process of learning, from first year to final year.

### *1.2 The aim and research questions*

In view of the situation that some CFL learners' worries at the School of Modern Languages, Ulster University (SML of UU) in Northern Ireland, a series of practical strategies were developed, aiming to overcoming their worries, sustaining their confidence and enhancing their learning experience throughout their degree study. To this end, this study addresses three research questions (RQs):

RQ1 Is Chinese really a difficult language?

RQ2 Will CFL get more difficult to handle with the progress of learning?

RQ3 Will the strategies used be effective in promoting the learners' CFL learning?

As possible responses to the research questions, the hypotheses (Hs) are:

H1 Chinese is not a difficult language, but a different language.

H2 With the progress of learning, CFL will become much more accessible and achievable.

H3 The strategies developed will be effective in promoting the learners' CFL learning.

The applications of the holistic learning strategies are expected to demonstrate if the hypotheses could be positive or negative. Actually the researchers expected a positive response in view of the existing achievement examples. All the approaches applied and the progress obtained as evidence to increase the learners' motivation will be presented in Section 3 Methods and Section 4 Results and discussion.

## **2. Literature Review**

In relation to the special situation and the strategies to solve the problem appeared in this study, this section reviews the importance of motivation and holistic learning strategies, because many researchers have found that these aspects play significant roles in sustaining language learners' motivation and enhancing their learning.

### *2.1 Understanding of 'motivation' and 'demotivation'*

According to the view of Afrough, Rahimi, Zarafshan (2014:49), motivation plays an important role in the process of language learning and teaching. It is usually defined as 'an internal state that arouses, directs, and maintains behaviour. We all know how it feels to be motivated, and to move

energetically toward a goal. We also know that it is something like working hard, even if we are not fascinated by the task. Motivation directs our behaviour' (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2003:354). Students who have higher motivation are more successful and efficient in their learning (Ely, 1986). Suslu (2006:1) emphasises 'Unlike unmotivated people who have lost impetus and inspiration to act, motivated people are energized and activated to the end of a task.' There are certain factors which reduce motivation or, in other words, cause demotivation. Dörnyei (2001) has defined demotivation as 'specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behaviour intention or an ongoing action' (p.143). (see Afrough et al, 2014:50). In the *Teaching and Researching Motivation*. In the *Teaching and Researching Motivation* by Dörnyei (2001), it describes that a demotivated person is someone who was once motivated, but has lost her or his interest for some reason. The situation of some CFL learners' worries and fear of failure causing demotivation at the School of Modern Languages, Ulster University (SML of UU) just fits this description. Therefore, conceptually, in this study, demotivation is meant to refer to 'losing interest', 'not having the determinants of motivation any more'. So taking strategies to increase their motivation is critical. The study by Zhang and Wang (2016) focuses on 'Overseas Chinese Learners Demotivation of Learning Chinese Characters', and based on their investigated data as reasons, having developed practical strategies to solve the demotivation problems in a specific aspect of dealing with Chinese characters, so that to improve learners' confidence. However, the situation at SML of UU requires being encouraged via many more ways in CFL learning.

## 2.2 Understanding of 'holistic learning' strategies

According to online *Cambridge Dictionary*, the word 'holistic' means 'dealing with or treating the whole of something or someone and not just a part.' Hammond & Gao (2002) have contributed their study 'Pan Gu's Paradigm: Chinese Education's return to Holistic Communication and Learning', in their paper they use the Chinese creation myth Pan Gu to indicate the relationship of parts and whole, 'Pan Gu's death created the colourful world, and all the beauty around us is part of him (Chen & Yang, 1995, see Hammond & Gao 2002).' This led them to develop their view that 'The holistic philosophies of ancient China see communication as the means by which the parts connected to the whole' (2002:229). Hammond & Gao (2002:240) suggest 'After all, learning not only involves the learner, but also the whole learning community.' In their study, they especially recommend *Dialogic Learning*, 'Modern *Dialogic learning* is holistic, interactive, cooperative and diversified, emphasising critical thinking, real time evaluation, hands on experience and overall educational quality' (2002:229), and believe the benefit of holistic and dialogic education could advantage students. Patel (2003:272)

who developed the Holistic Approach to Learning and Teaching Interaction, emphasises ‘The holistic approach develops students to be critical, confident and independent.’ (Young, 2007) puts ‘Holistic learning is a process for learning more effectively.... Holistic learning is the opposite of rote memorization. Instead of learning through force, your goal is to create webs of information that link together. Your goal when learning anything is to create a construct or an underlying understanding’. What are learning strategies? Rubin (1975:4) defined learning strategies as ‘the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge’. Rubin (1975) also recommended learning strategies as a means to promote successful learning. Furthermore, Griffiths & Cansiz (2015:473) put: ‘...awareness has been steadily growing of the importance of taking an holistic view of the strategy phenomenon and examining strategies not just in isolation but as part of an overall picture which includes learning situation, learning target and individual learner characteristics’.

Inspired by the review of the literature, the researchers in this study have linked the problems which appeared at the School of Modern Languages, Ulster University (SML of UU) in Northern Ireland, to a philosophical Chinese proverb 万变不离其宗 (wàn biàn bù lí qí zōng), indicating that things remain essentially the same despite all apparent changes, and thinking of a practical strategy by using 以不变应万变 (yǐ bú biàn yìng wàn biàn, coping with shifting events by sticking to a fundamental principle) and also 以万变应不变 (yǐ wàn biàn yìng bú biàn), applying changing methods to deal in the unchanged fundamental principles, to give CFL learners a positive encouragement particularly to reduce a demotivating factor: Year 2 students’ fear of Chinese getting ‘too complicated, too difficult’, thinking of stopping learning CFL at the end of first year.

This study cannot follow any existing theoretical framework due to the unique situation at SML of UU, in Northern Ireland. No previous study has been found in the literature which was based upon a similar situation, solving the similar problem. Therefore, this study would like to be considered as a trial at the exploratory stage rather than testing any existing theoretical framework. In order to solve the problem appearing among the CFL learners, ‘the Chinese is interesting, but hard to learn; It becomes more complicated with the progress of learning’, the researchers have carried out a series of practical strategies to assure them ‘CFL is a different language, not a difficult one’, which is very accessible and achievable, and would bring special edge to them. In this study, the researchers put all the strategies under the category of ‘holistic learning strategies’ for the purpose of providing a clear presentation, actually reflecting varieties of approaches used to prepare the learners to reduce the feeling of demotivation and overcome the challenges they have faced or may face in their continued CFL learning. Let the learners experience the approach 大道至简 (dà dào zhì jiǎn), meaning that the nature of the universe can be the simplest, or the most profound takes the simplest form, to let them experience the learning CFL progressively in a confident, joyful way.

In general, the review of the literature suggests a theoretical and practical orientation and encouragement to this study which was set out to sustain and enhance the CFL learners' interest, motivation and confidence in CFL learning, particularly Year 1 moving to Year 2 at the School of Modern Languages, Ulster University (SML of UU) in Northern Ireland.

### **3. Methods**

In this section, the collection of the data and the practices of strategies will be provided.

#### *3.1. The collection of the data*

Chinese at UU is run by the Chinese Subject Committee. These contain student representatives, normally one or two for each year of the course. These representatives are elected annually by their fellow students, usually in late October. They keep the various Course/Subject Committees informed about student response to the course and bring to their attention any difficulties or problems which may arise. The Subject Director of Chinese and Chair of the Subject Committee is responsible, in the first instance, for the organisation and management of the subject. On the day the students register at the University, they are assigned to an adviser of studies and an appointment is made for them to see his/her adviser before teaching commences. The role of the adviser of studies is to advise and help students with any academic or personal difficulties they may have. The advisors meet the students regularly throughout their study life at UU. In addition, the module directors offer certain consultation hours per week to meet the students. All the data drew upon the CFL practices and learning experience with all the students about 40 per semester, of all the levels at SML of UU in the years of 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017, via the ways as presented above. The data as qualitative results from the learners' feedback suggested many different demotivational factors, however, for Year One students: both more able and less able, the situation can be summarised into one main problem: 'worrying' for students about whether they should be successful if staying on CFL modules or dropping it to concentrate on another European language, to avoid potential risk of the failure that would affect the overall result of their degree. On the whole, due to a sense that with the progress learning, the CFL would become ever more challenging and 'more and more complicated and difficult' to handle, demotivation on CFL occurred. The action is needed to take and the problems to be solved.



### 3.2. *The practices of holistic learning strategies*

Considering those points of review as discussed above, in this section, to test the hypotheses, the main learning strategies which were developed and applied presented as below.

#### 3.2.1 *Chinese is not a difficult language, just a different language*

The response to RQ1 ‘Is Chinese really a difficult language?’ should be ‘Chinese is not a difficult language, but a different language’ as hypothesized ‘H1’.

The book *The Spirit of the Chinese People* published in 1915 by Gu (18 July 1857 – 30 April 1928), for which the title was translated as 《中国人的精神》 and also as 《春秋大义》, being regarded as the Classic Introduction to Chinese Culture published over a century ago, described Chinese people, the value of Chinese civilization, and the way of learning Chinese language. He introduced to the world that Chinese people hold four unique features: deep ( 深沉 ), broad and simple ( 博大和纯朴 ), and delicacy ( 灵敏 ). He also responded to the question ‘...is Chinese a difficult language?’ by explaining the nature of Chinese language, in addition to the rich significance, also indicating ‘simplicity’, e.g. grammar, how plain and simple in words, style and ideas: and yet how *deep* in thought, how deep in feeling it is. He believed that Chinese is a language of the heart, suggesting foreign people to learn not using *head*, but *heart*.

The students have been made clear that Chinese language is actually a very accessible language, and can be learnt in an enjoyable and confident way. With the benefit of its own unique linguistic feature and rich culture: e.g. in grammar, no conjugations, no declensions, no number agreement, no case changes; the tonal feature in speaking sounds like music; and its pictographic and ideographic features in *Hanzi* (Chinese characters) look like pictures. ‘Chinese is often perceived as a difficult language in Europe, especially Chinese characters, but its difficulty lies primarily in the fact that it is so different from European languages’ (Zhang, 2005). Therefore, the learning experience is not passively ‘pressuring’, but actively ‘encouraging’. More detailed strategies used will be provided in the following sections.

#### 3.2.2 *Building confidence and a sense of achievements*

The response to RQ2 ‘Will CFL get more difficult to handle with the progress of learning?’ should be ‘With the progress of learning, CFL will become much more accessible and achievable’ as hypothesized ‘H2’. The practical strategies in the following sections will be provided as evidence to support this hypothesis.



The CFL (Chinese as a Foreign Language) teaching has always been based upon a desire to inspire and guide learners in their studies, particularly at the beginning of each class, a clear structure of the session displays (all should be very clear on what they need to do and expect as an outcome from this session), with the information such as the learning objectives, resources, activities and success criteria, and also in the end elicit feedback by checking if the learning outcomes have been achieved, the resources are effectively used, appropriate pace has been taken, any suggestions or areas need to improve. The PowerPoint slides are prepared and used in each class to illustrate certain points, and also used for the purpose of independent study: reviewing, practice and extended learning after class (available on Blackboard Learn and by email), particularly for those who are highly motivated, expecting to learn/practice more, or who might be absent from the class for any reason. Overall, through a range of in class and outside class work, building integrated language skills along with intercultural knowledge, and developing interest, confidence, a sense of achievement in a gradual, progressive way. The learners were made understand that the more they learn, the more accessible ways they could develop based on the existing knowledge and skills, and the more progress they could achieve, which can be described in a Chinese saying 循序渐进 (xún xù jiàn jìn, meaning ‘advance gradually in due order’).

### 3.2.3 *Taking simple forms in explanations*

In teaching, as a famous saying goes: ‘If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.’ It indicates in Chinese as 大道至简 (dà dào zhì jiǎn), that the nature of the universe can be the simplest, or the most profound takes the simplest form, e.g. the teaching in class, particularly grammar, should not be too prescriptive, using key language points or speech patterns to present the principal meanings, and then integrate into communication, delivering the discourse, practising, reflecting ‘...how meanings are constructed...’ (Macdonell, 1986). ‘Grammar is not just learning rules. It is a way to help students along the way to communication’ (Azar & Swan, 2015).

### 3.2.4 *Understanding the word order and expanding vocabulary*

‘It is often said all Chinese grammar is syntax, all Chinese syntax is word order, and therefore all Chinese grammar is word order’ (Chao, 1968, p.260, see Jiang 2009:1). Jiang (2009) also states: ‘Word order can therefore serve as an important syntactic device in Chinese for information structuring. Rearrangement of word order not only brings meaning change, but also shows the skilful manipulation of the words in a sentence’ (p.5). The review of literature on Bi (2015) brings out that the same Chinese characters would produce absolutely different effect when they are used by different people (‘同样的汉字，不同的人编排出来，效果也是绝然不同。’). On seeing some examples, the learners could

understand the rich Chinese culture and the linguistic nature with enthusiasm, advancing the ability to develop more from a single instance (举一反三 jǔ yī fǎn sān) e.g. 不很好 (not very good) vs. 很不好 (very bad), the different meanings appear due to the different orders of words in a phrase or a sentence. More examples as below:

四川人不怕辣，湖南人辣不怕，江西人怕不辣。(Sichuan people do not fear of spicy food, Hunan people do not fear no matter how spicy it is, Jiangxi people cannot do without spicy food.) It indicates that the feeling towards spicy food is actually increasing.

(source: Wu, Zh.2003)

不一样大，不大一样，一样不大，大不一样 (not the same big, not exact the same, as small, very different)

(source: [laughter] Chinese 【段子】爆笑中文 <http://m.najiaoluo.com/gaoxiao/43269.html>)

客上天然居，居然天上客 (Visitors go up to the natural home, actually they are visitors in heaven.)

人过大佛寺，寺佛大过人 (People passed a large Buddhist temple, the Buddha is larger than people)

(source: palindrome couplet 回文联 <http://baike.baidu.com/view/486470.htm>)

At this point, the researcher has to explain the use of a term ‘false friends’. According to online Oxford Dictionary, ‘false friends’ is defined as ‘A word or expression that has a similar form to one in a person's native language, but a different meaning (for example English magazine and French magasin ‘shop’). The review of literature reveals that this expression goes back to 1928, when Koessler and Derocquigny used the term faux amis in their well-known book *Les Faux Amis, ou les Trahisons du Vocabulaire Anglais*, which is the origin of this metaphor. ‘False friends’ have been a very popular topic and extensively studied in different language areas such as translation studies, language teaching, lexicography or contrastive linguistics. ‘False friends’ also known as False cognates, e.g. two pairs of words which have a similar form and /or pronunciation but different meanings in two languages. ‘False friends’ are often taken as an issue or a ‘problem’ to deal with in the field of ELT for Intercultural Communicative practices, e.g. English-Russian False Friends, English-French False Friends, English-German, and the like. English and Chinese are of very different language groups, and phonologically sound so different that its very rare for words to be confused. The reason why the term ‘false friend’ is borrowed in this study is mainly because the learners at SML of UU are very familiar with the term as they are taking the combination course with a European language. The term was well accepted for learning CFL, in aspect of word orders, which proved to be very effective in understanding, memorising and developing vocabulary. There are some examples as below:

As ‘false friends’ in word order:

去过 to have been to	过去 in the past
法语 French	语法 grammar
好友 good friend	友好 friendly (relations)
前门 front door	门前 in front of the door
后门 back door	门后 behind the door
女儿 daughter	儿女 children
孙子 grandson	子孙 children and grandchildren/offspring
火山 volcano	山火 mountain fire
牛奶 milk	奶牛 milk cow/dairy cow
鸡蛋 egg	蛋鸡 layer
鸡肉 chicken meat	肉鸡 meat chicken
故事 story	事故 accident
错过 to miss out	过错 mistake

Further for ‘false friends’: synonym

e.g. 嘴, 口 both mean ‘mouth’, however sometimes they cannot be interchangeably used based on Chinese culture. ‘两口子’ as a colloquial expression refers to ‘wife and husband’, however ‘两嘴子’ should not be used. Another example: ‘可口的饭菜’ meaning ‘delicious, and suit one’s taste’, however ‘可嘴的饭菜’ would produce different meaning.

Further for ‘false friends’: Punctuation and reading

一张两可的字据:

写道: “无米面也可无鸡鸭也可无鱼肉也可无银钱也可。”

念道:

1. “无米面也可, 无鸡鸭也可, 无鱼肉也可, 无银钱也可。”
2. “无米, 面也可; 无鸡, 鸭也可; 无鱼, 肉也可; 无银, 钱也可。”

(source: Zhang, X., Tian, Sh., et al. 2003).

This literally means: A two-way contract:

Written: "no rice and flour can also be OK no chicken and duck can also be OK no fish and meat can also be OK no gold and silver can also be OK."

Reading:

1. “no rice and flour can also be OK, no chicken and duck can also be OK, no fish and meat can also be OK, no gold and silver can also be OK.”

2. “no rice, flour can be OK; no chicken, duck can also be OK; no fish, meat can also be OK; no gold, silver can be OK. ”

The example as above makes the CFL learners aware that the use of punctuations should not be neglected, they are not merely signs or marks to divide sentences and phrases, but really carrying weight in meanings in written Chinese. The review of literature reveals that the role of punctuations in Chinese language has always been taken seriously. Shi (2015), when commenting on the use of punctuations in a short story Hometown (first published in May 1921) by Lu Xun (1881-1936, who has been considered as China's greatest modern writer), provided ‘……标点符号是无声的语言，无言的表情，别样的文字，所以它能使书面语的表情达意更加确切，更为生动。巧妙运用标点符号，能把那些用言语难以完全表达的言外之意暗示出来，它辅助文字使表情达意变得更为含蓄，更具韵味。’ This emphasizes the importance of punctuations, which in general, as a silent language, silent expression, different kind of written language, so they can make the expression more accurate and more vivid. Ingenious use of punctuation can fully express the words implied, promoting a special quality of implication, and flavor.

All those as presented above reflect the philosophical Chinese proverb 万变不离其宗 (wàn biàn bù lí qí zōng), indicating that things remain essentially the same despite all apparent changes, and the CFL learners are encouraged to use a practical strategy by using 以不变应万变 (coping with shifting events by sticking to a fundamental principle) and also 以万变应不变 (applying changing methods to deal in the unchanged fundamental principles). As the strategies applied shows, CFL is quite accessible, and not difficult to learn, because many words, expressions can be developed or derived from the existing vocabulary, and enhancing the understanding, but meanwhile special attention should be paid while learning Chinese, for example the order of the words in sentences, the use of punctuations.

### 3.2.5 Chinese and English - similarities and reliabilities

Encouraging the CFL learners to understand Chinese and English - similarities and contrasts, and enjoy the perfectly logical and reasonable expressions in Chinese, e.g.:

上下文 context

趁热打铁 strike while the iron is hot

天价 sky-high price

如鱼得水 take sth. like a duck to water

一路顺风! Have a good trip!

加油! Come on!

那个人很吃香 That person is very popular.

给你压岁钱。Here is your New Year money.

不见不散。Be there or be square.

没有后悔药可吃 (literally, no regretted medicine to eat ) It is no using crying over spilt milk.

接风 (literally, to welcome a wind-beaten traveller or guest) to offer a welcome dinner to a friend or family member from afar

人山人海 (literally, people mountain, people sea) huge crowds

In a similar way of understanding, based on their existing knowledge such as homophone 连年有鱼/余 (The identical sound of the words ‘fish’ (yú) 鱼 and the word 余 (yú), meaning ‘extra’, ‘surplus’, ‘May you have surplus and remainders year after year’, fish to symbolize abundance), 福到 / 倒了 (the character for “upside-down”, “倒” [dào], is a homophone of the character for “to arrive”, “到” [dào]. So this means that “福” (happiness, good fortune) is “arriving”, they are able to work out the meanings such as 阅 reading (悦 with pleasure, enjoying) 读; 效 effect (笑 smiling, laughing result) 果

With the benefits of Chinese language covering rich knowledge historically, philosophically, culturally, the well-known expression is 借‘题’发挥 (jiè tí fā huī), so the learners are encourage to develop the learning strategy as

借‘词’发挥 (using existing words to develop more by adding different words), e.g.

意思 meaning, 有意思 interesting, 没意思 boring, 不好意思 embarrassed, 小意思 small gift/ small token of kindly feeling

Another example: 剧 theatrical work, drama/play/opera, 话剧 play, 歌 opera, 京剧 Beijing opera, 音乐剧 musical play, 舞剧 dance drama

借‘字’发挥 (using Chinese character to develop more by adding strokes), e.g.

一 one, 人 person, people, 大 big, 太 very, too (excessive), extremely, 天 sky

Heteronyms 好 hǎo, good, 好看 ; 好 hào, be fond of; be keen on 爱好, 喜好

### 3.2.6 Chinese cinema incorporated into a credited module of ALT

Chinese cinema incorporated into a credited module of ALT courses for Year 1 and Year 2 in terms of National and Transnational Cinema, and Mapping the City, the study of Chinese films such as Raise the Red Lantern; The Flowers of War; Go Lala Go!; Cala, My Dog! were delivered, to broaden students’ knowledge of Chinese history, culture and society. This enables the students in ALT gain a rich and unique insight into different ways of thinking and living of Chinese people, and by making comparisons of other countries cinematic styles, into the societies, cultures and peoples across the globe.

### 3.2.7 Expanding: CFL skills and developing an edge in career

The following actions have been taken to enhance the CFL learners' learning experience and real life practice.

Bringing Chinese language and culture alive in the classroom: by contact and practise with native Chinese language assistants and visiting students from China.

Organising 2-week Summer school to China every year is aimed to develop intercultural awareness and effective communication.

Sending CFL learners to local Confucius Classrooms as school helper to gain an insight of the relationship of teaching and learning, between teachers and learners, a sense of responsibility.

Supporting CFL learners to work part time during summer break time at places associating with Chinese business, e.g. Ulster University (Coleraine Campus) is located on the beautiful North Coast 20km from the Giant's Causeway (World Heritage site and Northern Ireland's top tourist attraction), with possibility of job opportunities to be with international tourists, including those from China.

Where there are unchanged fundamental principles, methods can be changed/updated to meet learners' demand. Overall, all these bring the CFL situation that students enjoy active, innovative learning as much as teachers enjoy active and effective teaching, and to promote learners' understanding that to learn another language which is very different from their mother tongue can add another dimension in their thought patterns and viewpoints.

### 3.2.8 The relationship of teaching and learning

As a famous saying goes: ‘弟子不必不如师，师不必贤于弟子’ (dìzǐ bù bì bù rú shī, shī bù bì xián yú dìzǐ), reflecting Confucius education principles, meaning that students may not inferior to teachers, while teachers may not be superior to students. Interestingly, it was found that the English word TEACH can be seen as LEARN when is mirrored upside down. That indicates the consistency of a popular saying regarding education in Chinese 教学相长 (Teaching is learning) which promotes the teachers' practice of leaning to teach and teaching to learn. The CFL teachers normally discuss with the learners not only about their concerns, but also exchanging learning strategies, gaining living, practical methods in CFL learning and promoting teaching. The holistic learning strategies applied proved to be very effective, inspiring teachers and transforming learners.

## 4. Results and discussion

In this section, the results will be summarized and discussed.

### *4.1. Results and achievements*

In response to the research questions, the results as evidence to prove all the strategies as discussed above are highly effective, and the students have sustained high motivation, feeling confident and rewarding in their CFL learning. This section particularly positively responds to RQ3 ‘Will the strategies used be effective in promoting the learners’ CFL learning? The results and achievements are as listed below:

- The students of 1st, 2nd, and final year all have passed the coursework and exams.
- There appear some students who withdrew for fear of the ‘difficult’ language have returned to CFL courses.
- The blended learning: integrating online resources into core textbooks or face-to-face tutorials, e.g. university’s Blackboard, MMRU (Multimedia Resources Unit) have been effectively used.
- The writing assignments and the passages in the exams in handwritten Chinese characters have greatly impressed the external examiners with high comments.
- HSK Levels 1, 2, 3 training classes have resulted in a very successful rate, and the preparing for Level 4 and onwards is particularly impressive.
- The UK National Chinese Calligraphy Competitions which is run yearly, all the participants won prizes, out of a large amount of competitors, respectively being awarded 1st prize, 2nd prizes, 3rd prizes.
- The contact and practice with language assistants, and the visiting students from China have brought Chinese language and culture alive in the classroom.
- Summer School at partner universities in China also has brought successful results, having improved language skills and gained real experience of everyday life in Chinese communities.
- The CFL learners have regularly been sent to local Confucius Classrooms with partner schools to be ‘helpers’, working together with *Hanban* teachers, experiencing the CFL learning in class, and a role of being a teacher.
- Some students have passed part time job interviews during the summer break, eg working as a tourist guide of English - Chinese bilinguals at the Giant’s Causeway, the famous scenic area (World



Heritage site and Northern Ireland's top tourist attraction).

#### 4.2 *The feedback from the CFL learners*

In sum, the holistic learning strategies used in this study with the CFL learners at SML of UU proved to be effective and desirable. It is positively consistent with those researchers and practioners as discussed in the section of Literature. Patel (2003:272) who developed the Holistic Approach to Learning and Teaching Interaction, emphasises 'The holistic approach develops students to be critical, confident and independent.' (Young, 2007) puts 'Holistic learning is a process for learning more effectively.... Holistic learning is the opposite of rote memorization. Instead of learning through force, your goal is to create webs of information that link together.'

Below are the samples selected from the CFL learners to present their learning experience and their enhanced interest, motivation and confidence.

- Student A: I choose to come back to the Chinese course after leaving for a while, because I missed the interesting Chinese class, and interactions in class, particularly the cultural events, including the summer trip in China. Now I am quite confident, I will continue to learn Chinese while I am abroad in Year 3.
- Student B: After travelling to China twice I have been enabled to have a greater understanding and appreciation for Chinese Culture. The experience of visiting a University in China, meeting and socialising with students as well as learning martial arts, calligraphy, paper cutting and fan dancing as well as having language classes has allowed me to have a glimpse into Chinese Culture. Furthermore visiting a Chinese family in their home and making dumplings with them gave us an insight into how the average middle class Chinese family lived. Chinese people are extremely hospitable and they really treat their guests well. ... Having been twice, my confidence in speaking Chinese has grown, it's really great when you order a drink, ask a question or do a self-introduction and the locals understand you.
- Student C: Having received this outstanding opportunity to work part time during my studies at such an amazing place 'The Giant's Causeway', words cannot describe how much experience I have gained from integrating my languages (French, Spanish and Chinese) with wonderful visitors from all over the world.... Over the summer whilst working at the Causeway, I met some amazing Chinese tourists who provided me with a great opportunity to practise my Chinese with them. And it's in doing this that my confidence grew because for me, not only is knowing Chinese vocabulary and grammar important, but being able to transfer these skills and utilize it in my everyday life is equally important.

## 5. Conclusion

As the title indicates, this paper reports a study on how the CFL learners at the School of Modern Languages, Ulster University (SML of UU) in Northern Ireland, were helped to solve the ‘demotivation’ problem caused by a sense of ‘Chinese getting more complicated and more difficult with the progress of more learning’, hesitating whether to stay on when entering Year 2, or dropping it to choose other modern languages for fear of failure and would affect the overall result of their degree. The research questions have been answered, and the hypotheses demonstrate positive, the aim has been achieved, and the practical strategies under the category of ‘holistic learning’ proved to be highly effective. The study indicates that an overall approach that integrates time immemorial methods in concert with timely innovations would appear to be most effective and desirable to learners, offering them the familiarity and reliability of tradition, with the benefits of freedom, experimentation, and holistic view. In this section, the limitations of this study, implications and the need for further research will be discussed.

### *5.1. Limitations*

This study has not followed any existing theoretical framework due to this being a unique situation for CFL learning and teaching in higher education. No previous study has been found in the literature which was based upon a similar problem. This study has not used conventional research instruments such as questionnaires or formal interviews, e.g. with recordings or formal statistical data analysis. Instead, it has employed the results obtained from the feedback at regular Chinese Subject Committee meetings and regular meetings with the advisors of the study, as evidence to prove the researcher’s research questions and test their hypotheses. The qualitative results appear to have provided sufficient data undertaken in this study, as this study focuses on one main problem rather than doing a systematic research by investigating the demotivating factors, which will be another research study. Overall, this study indicates: active innovative learning - active effective teaching; “Holistic” opens up new dimensions to the teaching and learning experience; Learning Chinese can open up new dimensions to the learner’s holistic experience.

### 5.2. Implications and future study

The current study indicates the important roles of sustaining and enhancing CFL learners' interest, motivation and confidence in the course of formal learning. In addition, the unique situation with the possibility to allow students to drop one subject at the beginning of Year 2 at this university really indicates a big challenge for both the teachers and learners to face, to handle. The holistic learning strategies need to be continuously used and developed with the increasing learning and updated requirements. A systematic research study in the future on investigating the CFL learners' motivating and demotivating factors with the learners in Northern Ireland would make a very useful contribution in promoting CFL teaching and learning.

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